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SENATE ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE

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STATEMENT OF
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DIRECTOR, PLANS AND POLICY, JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF
ON
MILITARY PRESENCE AND CAPABILITIES
BEFORE THE
SENATE ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE
27 JANUARY 1984

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Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee:

On behalf of the Department of Defense and the Joint Chiefs of Staff, I welcome the opportunity to appear before you today as you continue your hearings on the worldwide petroleum outlook for Fiscal Year 1984. It is a broad undertaking which deserves constant review. Today, as we continue to work to accomplish our goal of stability in the Persian Gulf and ensure that our strategy of deterrence remains credible, we seek ways to improve the knowledge of decisionmakers about the military presence and capabilities we have in the Gulf.

At present, the greatest threat to the stability of the Persian Gulf is an escalation of the Iran-Iraq conflict that would limit or cut off access to the Persian Gulf, or that would inflict damage to the oil production and distribution facilities of the non-belligerent Gulf countries.

Neither Iran or Iraq has the military capability to achieve a quick victory over the other. The resulting "war of attrition" favors Iran due to its greater manpower base and better economic situation. Reports, however, indicate that Iraq is attempting to restore its Gulf oil export capability. If Iran attacks the repaired Iraqi Gulf oil export facilities--or shipping carrying Iraqi oil--Iraq will have reason to retaliate

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by attacking Iranian economic targets. If Iraq decides to attack Iran's Kharg Island facility, Iran could reciprocate by attacks on neutral shipping or on the facilities of the non-belligerent Gulf states, since the Iran's goal would be to cut-off Iraq's economic support.

Three options Iran might choose to pursue in attempting to carry out her threats are:

- A. Mining the Strait of Hormuz or the waters of the Persian Gulf or the Gulf of Oman.
- B. Mining coupled with interdiction of neutral shipping.
- C. Mining and interdiction of neutral shipping coupled with attacks on the key facilities of the non-belligerent Gulf nations.

MINING OPERATIONS

Iran is believed to have approximately 60 World War II British moored, contact mines. Because of their age and probable maintenance condition, these mines may be ineffective. Additionally, North Korea has provided approximately 300 mines of an unidentified type to Iran.

Iran has developed a heliborne mine delivery capability. This operational delivery technique significantly enhances

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Iran's capability to employ mines in the Strait of Hormuz and the coastal waters of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) nations. The GCC is made up of Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). (A map is attached for your convenience.)

The psychological impact of announced or real mining would probably halt most shipping. Last year we saw the impact that some unintentionally-released Iraqi mines had on the shipping community. While not directly responsible for the high insurance rates that exist today, the time frame that insurance companies would cover a merchant vessel in the Gulf was shortened, and ship owners and crews became increasingly cautious, allowing travel only during daylight hours.

Many knowledgeable oil analysts feel that if Iran states that the Strait of Hormuz and surrounding vicinity is mined, tanker traffic would come to an immediate halt. The threat would have to be honored until the claim of mining could be proven false or a safe channel cleared.

MINING WITH INTERDICTION

In conjunction with mining operations, Iran could conduct

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joint naval and air attacks against merchant shipping in either the Strait of Hormuz or throughout the Gulf.

We would expect the majority of Iranian aircraft that would participate in attacks on targets in the Strait of Hormuz to come from the 9th Fighter Base, which is located at Bandar Abbas. Bandar Behesti or, as it was called, Chah Bahar, although not an operational fighter base, is capable of supporting F-4 aircraft. We expect aircraft operating from Bandar Behesti to augment Iranian naval efforts to interdict maritime traffic in the Strait of Hormuz or Gulf of Oman.

Bandar Abbas is the homeport to the largest surface combatants in the Iranian Navy. The Sumner class destroyers and Vosper class frigates from this facility routinely patrol the Strait of Hormuz area. Although Iran's Battle class destroyer is now operating for the first time in approximately two years, it, like all of Iran's Naval units, suffers from maintenance problems. However, at least two of the destroyers and three of the frigates are seaworthy, as well as four or five of the missile boats stationed at a second naval facility, Bushehr. Iranian combatants have the necessary endurance to operate throughout the entire Gulf area without refueling.

Most of Iran's warships are assessed as being systems-degraded, especially in regard to electronic and missile-control

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systems. Guns, therefore, are likely to be their most effective weapons. However, some missile capability exists and could also be used to interdict shipping.

ATTACKS ON THE KEY FACILITIES

AIR

We would expect to see the majority of Iranian aircraft that would participate in any attack on Saudi Arabia's coastal areas launched from the 6th Fighter Base, located at Bushehr.

We expect that the F-14s that would provide air cover for Bushehr's strike aircraft would be launched from the air base at Shiraz. The combat radii of Iranian strike aircraft will vary with the ordnance load carried, the flight profile flown, and whether or not the aircraft are refueled. The entire Persian Gulf area, including such important locations as Abqaiq (Ab-Cake), Dhahran (Dah-Ran); Ras Tanura (Ras Ta-Nu-Ra); Kuwait City; Manama (Ma-Na-Ma), Bahrain; and even Riyadh (Ri-Yad) are within the range of Iranian Air Force strike aircraft.

NAVAL

In addition to interdicting shipping, the Iranian Navy could interdict key coastal facilities, for example, water desalinization plants, oil and gas production and distribution facilities, and ports of non-belligerent Gulf states.

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The Iranian Navy also has a capability to land marines on regional beaches, but it would be difficult for Iran to sustain any lengthy operation, especially in the face of opposition. A hit-and-run amphibious raid, targeted against lightly defended or undefended offshore or coastal facilities, is the most likely manner in which the marines would be used.

SPECIAL OPERATIONS

Although Iran's special forces are heavily committed to the war with Iraq, this elite force could be used selectively in raids against ships or key facilities. Additionally, numerous Revolutionary Guard units are also capable of conducting commando, sapper, or suicide attacks against ships or shore facilities. Recent reports that Iran may use small, high-speed boats or aircraft loaded with explosives for suicide attacks, increases the threat to naval vessels and merchant ships in the region. Tankers are especially vulnerable to commando or suicide attacks while in port, at anchor, or while transiting in congested or coastal waters. A threat to facilities and transiting tankers is also posed by the Iranian marine brigade. Current estimates are that the brigade consists of approximately 500 men. The marines are deployed in small detachments along

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the Iranian coast, on the southern Gulf islands, and at Bandar Abbas and Bushehr.

THREAT SUMMARY

In conclusion, it is evident that Iran has both the capability to conduct mining operations, attack shipping, or strike key oil production or distribution facilities. Tehran has the military capability to close, at least temporarily, the vital Strait of Hormuz. Tehran can conduct these operations using some or all of its available military forces. In any of these scenarios, Iran's military capability represents a significant threat to the stability of the Gulf.

U.S. FORCES CURRENTLY IN THE AREA

Regional military planning responsibility is assigned to Commander in Chief U.S. Central Command, with Headquarters at MacDill Air Force Base, Florida. He is represented in the Persian Gulf area by a Forward Headquarters Element, which is aboard the USS LaSalle. The USS LaSalle is also the flagship of the naval commander in the area, the Commander, Middle East Force (COMIDEASTFOR). The Middle East Force is currently

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composed of five ships--the LaSalle plus two destroyers and two frigates.

Additional naval forces in the immediate area are provided from the Pacific Fleet. Currently in the North Arabian Sea is a carrier battle group (CVBG) made up of the carrier (the USS Midway) and six escorts. The escorts are one cruiser, two destroyers, and three frigates.

U.S. Air Force assets in the area are four E-3A (AWACS) surveillance aircraft and three aerial refueling tankers, all based in Saudi Arabia.

There are no U.S. ground forces in the area.

REGIONAL FORCES AND CAPABILITIES

The military capability of the Persian Gulf states varies widely, but collectively it is significant. However, in our judgement, the GCC states do not have either the necessary forces or the full range of capabilities necessary to respond militarily to the Iranian threat as we see it.

Of the regional forces, the air forces are considered to be the most effective and most capable. Of the non-belligerent Gulf nations, Saudi Arabia, Oman, and Kuwait are considered to have the most effective armed forces.

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From both a military and a political viewpoint, any military effort to ensure freedom of navigation in the Strait of Hormuz, the Persian Gulf, or the Gulf of Oman; or to protect key facilities of the non-belligerent Gulf states, should be a multinational effort with concerned nations--oil consumers as well as oil producers--contributing to the effort proportional to their ability.

OMAN

In any multinational effort, it is expected that Oman would contribute, in accordance with existing US-Omani agreements, naval patrol craft and provide U.S. forces access to its facilities. Additionally, the Omani Air Force could provide some protection to shipping transiting the Strait of Hormuz or in the vicinity of Omani territorial waters.

SAUDI ARABIA

It is estimated that, without unduly degrading its readiness posture on its southern border, Saudi Arabia could contribute a squadron of F-15s, naval patrol craft and surface minesweepers to any multinational effort to deter or, if need be, assist in countering an escalation of the Iran-Iraq conflict.

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KUWAIT

Kuwait, due to its geographic location at some distance from the Strait of Hormuz, and due to the threat Iran presents to its Northern border, is not considered capable of providing much more than some air protection for merchant shipping in its territorial waters.

BAHRAIN, QATAR, AND THE U.A.E.

The armed forces of these three states are not considered capable of much more than protecting their own key facilities against a sapper attack or an amphibious raid. However, the effectiveness of the armed forces of these countries to counter the aforementioned attacks could be measureably increased through the use of mobile training teams provided by the U.S.

ACCESS

The greatest contribution that any of the participating Gulf states can make to a multinational effort is to permit access to their facilities and provide support for extra-regional forces that use them. Included in this support would be water, messing, billeting and medical facilities, as well as base security services.

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MILITARY PRESENCE & CAPABILITIES

Our assessment of the total notional force requirements to meet the current range of Iranian threats includes:

Air Force

Surveillance units: 9 E-3As, 2 RC-135s

Protection units: 48-60 Fighters, AC-130 Gunships

Air-Refueling: 5 KC-10, 3 KC-135

Naval Forces

Mine Countermeasures Forces: 4-6 Minesweepers,

1 HELIMINERON

Support: 1 LHA/LPH, 1 Buoy Tender, 1 LPD

Surveillance: 6-9 P-3s

Protection: 1-CVBG, 8 Surface Combatants, Patrol Craft

Additional Force Requirements

Surveillance: Air Search Radars

Protection: SAMs/AAA, Coventional Forces (To supplement regional forces as required)

Support: Advisors, Technicians

Our assessment of the forces required to defend key facilities in the region has not yet been completed because of lack of information on what participating Gulf nations will

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provide; however, there are no U.S. ground forces in the region which could contribute to facility defense.

CONCEPT OF OPERATION

A three-phase concept of operations has been developed to deter and, if need be, contain any escalation of the Iran-Iraq conflict that threatens US interests in the region. This concept provides for measured responses to a wide range of actions.

PHASE I

Phase I of the concept entails deterrence through presence. This concept calls for active patrolling of the Strait of Hormuz and the sea lines-of-communications (LOCs) by the ships assigned to the Middle East Force. It also calls for a strong Navy presence in the Northern Arabian Sea--our carrier battle group, or CVBG. This phase can essentially be accomplished with the U.S. forces presently deployed to SWA: the Middle East Force (MIDEASTFOR), one CVBG in the Indian Ocean, and the E-3A (AWACS) surveillance detachment which operates out of Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, although the deployment of one land-based air superiority squadron would be highly desirable.

PHASE II

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Phase II of the concept call for active US measures to re-open the Strait of Hormuz. This phase entails the use of proportionate military force to neutralize any vessel or aircraft that is conducting mining operation or attacking friendly or neutral merchantmen in the Strait of Hormuz or the Persian Gulf. This phase requires the deployment of additional U.S. forces to the region to augment our forces presently deployed.

PHASE III

Phase III of the concept entails protecting, when requested by the participating nations and if approved by the National Command Authority (NCA), neutral shipping bound for the ports of the non-belligerent Gulf states in the Strait of Hormuz and in the international waters of the Persian Gulf. Additionally, if requested, Phase III entails assisting the non-belligerent Gulf states in protecting their key facilities against attacks. Phase III would require the deployment of forces in addition to those forces needed to implement Phase I and II.

CONSULTATIONS WITH FRIENDS AND ALLIES

At the direction of the President, the Department of State initiated consultations with the non-belligerent Persian Gulf

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states, our Allies, and other friends in an effort to get a political agreement from them to enter into military-to-military discussions. The military discussions, initiated earlier this month, address coordinated or combined actions that could be taken to deter or, if need be, contain an escalation of the Persian Gulf conflict. To date the responses received have indicated that participating nations share our perception of the threat. Although our bilateral military consultations have not yet resulted in combined planning agreements, the participating nations have expressed a desire to continue the military-to-military dialogue. Indications received are that the political leadership in the concerned nations are still actively considering our specific military proposals.

COUNTER-TERRORIST PRECAUTIONS

The previously mentioned reports of Iranian plans to conduct terrorist suicide attacks on US naval vessels in the Persian Gulf has caused us considerable concern.

As a result, the U.S. units in the area have been placed at increased conditions of readiness. These precautions include the partial manning of the ships' weapon systems and repair parties as well as setting increased material condition, such as

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closure of water-tight hatches and doors, especially those below the waterline. In addition, U.S. Marine Corps STINGER teams, armed with portable surface-to-air missile systems, are being deployed to augment the weapons suit of those Middle East Force ships that do not have point-defense missile systems installed. These teams will be integrated into the ships' combat direction systems, thus increasing the ships' ability to defend themselves against a kamikaze-type terrorist attack.

CONCLUSION

In summary, we have ready and capable forces present to deter the threat; we are continuously working with friendly regional states and allies to secure stability through a coordinated effort; and we are prepared to respond immediately to maintain the right of free passage in the Strait of Hormuz and the Persian Gulf.

This concludes my formal remarks. I am more than happy to answer any question the Committee may have.

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